

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 312.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert Luis Santos, of Texas, to be Director of the Census for a term expiring December 31, 2026. (Reappointment).

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 312, Robert Luis Santos, of Texas, to be Director of the Census for a term expiring December 31, 2026. (Reappointment).

Charles E. Schumer, Chris Van Hollen, John Hickenlooper, Brian Schatz, Tina Smith, Jeff Merkley, Tammy Duckworth, Patrick J. Leahy, Christopher A. Coons, Sheldon Whitehouse, Ben Ray Lujan, Christopher Murphy, Martin Heinrich, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Michael F. Bennet, Ron Wyden, Raphael Warnock.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, since the earliest days of COVID-19, Washington Democrats have admitted they want to use the pandemic as the pretext to permanently transform our country. They hope to use the temporary crisis as a Trojan horse for permanent radical change. One of their massive, ideological goals is a huge series of disruptive changes to American families' childcare.

The story is like Democrats' long march toward socialized medicine:

take an intimate area of American life, pile on a maze of new mandates, regulations, cost increases and subsidies, and push families out of the driver's seat so Washington can run their lives.

Not too long ago, the Democrats' promise that "if you liked your healthcare plan, you could keep it" was awarded the "lie of the year."

Now they want a sequel: If you like your childcare, you can keep your childcare.

Democrats want to sweep the first 5 years of children's lives into a new set of top-down, one-size-fits-all, Washington-knows-best regulations.

Their Big Government scheme would make childcare more expensive and use taxpayer money to subsidize only some families—those who structure their arrangements in ways that Democrats like. Other families would be left to fend for themselves, now in an even more inflated market.

Their bill would give Democrats and bureaucrats massive new authority they could use to shape curriculum and standards nationwide. If providers don't play along, they could be left out in the cold.

The Biden administration wants to insert itself into the most intimate family decisions and tell parents how to care for their toddlers. The entire scheme violates the basic principle of family fairness.

Speaker PELOSI suggested last week that she approves of one kind of family structure: "Parents earning and children learning."

She said Democrats want government programs to "liberat[e]" families so that both parents work full time.

Well, there are lots of families like that model, but other families prefer other models. Not everybody defines "liberation" the same way, yet Washington Democrats want Big Government to bless certain family arrangements and not others.

Has your family made a different set of sacrifices so a father or mother can parent full time?

Sorry, Democrats want to redistribute money away from your family to other households that may earn even more money.

Has your family built its whole life around a plan for a grandparent to provide in-home care?

Too bad. Grandma or Grandpa would have to fill out paperwork and apply for the bureaucrats' blessing or that family could be denied help also.

Democrats could easily end up taxing working-class families with a full-time parent in order to subsidize the arrangements of wealthier two-income households. They are steamrolling over family fairness, over families' choices and options, over the diversity of American families and their aspirations.

By the way, Democrats appear to want to change the law in ways that could force faith-based providers to put aside sincerely held religious beliefs.

Just look at who would be administering all this. One key player would

be HHS Secretary Becerra—the partisan California lawyer who got famous by suing Catholic nuns for being too Catholic and crisis pregnancy centers for being pro-life—a hardcore culture warrior.

And this person is going to be the new national czar for early childhood?

Another key figure would be Secretary Cardona. You may recall, a few months back, Senate Republicans had to stop our Education Secretary from diverting funding for civics education towards woke propaganda that had been debunked by historians.

And this is the same Biden administration whose Attorney General just wrote an entire memo singling out concerned parents who speak up at their local school board meetings. Now they want to extend their Federal control over babies and toddlers as well.

Finally—get this—this tangled new entitlement would be so mind-bogglingly expensive that Democrats can't even put a long-term dollar amount on it. The estimate is that all this government meddling will cost \$400 billion over just the first several years. After that, nobody really knows what the blank check will add up to.

Taxpayers are supposed to pony up a blank check for the privilege of having less control over family choices. I think the American people will take a pass.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. President, now, on another matter, each year, the National Defense Authorization Act represents the Senate's most consequential opportunity to help steer the course of defense and security policy. It is our chance to lay out our priorities for keeping America safe.

For the past 60 years, without exception, Senate majorities have done the job and passed this crucial bill on a bipartisan vote, but, this year, our Democratic majority is sleepwalking toward yet another preventable problem.

The process began with earnest deliberation among our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee. Chairman REED and Ranking Member INHOFE presided over extensive discussions. They adopted 143 bipartisan amendments, and the committee reported out a final bill by a margin of 23 to 3.

Our colleagues began a process that should end with broad support for clear, bipartisan priorities, like equipping us to keep up with China's military modernization and combat a new generation of terrorist threats, but the Democratic leader has left the NDAA trapped in limbo while Democrats toy with another reckless taxing-and-spending spree.

Neglecting the NDAA denies our Armed Forces the certainty they need, and it denies the Senate a debate about the most consequential national security issues. This is especially misguided in light of the Biden administration's erratic, rudderless approach to foreign policy.

Just last week, administration officials acknowledged that hundreds more Americans than they initially claimed remain trapped in Afghanistan, that terrorists in the country are just months away from being capable of conducting attacks on U.S. soil, and that no basing agreements to allow for over-the-horizon operations had yet been reached.

Emboldened terrorists are already stepping up violence against Americans and our allies in the Middle East. The administration is failing to deter Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.

The Russian threat has grown since President Biden took office, though you wouldn't know it by how quiet Senate Democrats have been on the subject. Putin is committed to modernizing his military to threaten U.S. and NATO forces, weaponizing his country's energy resources to pressure Europe, and escalating Russia's military pressure on Ukraine.

Of course, the American military, American industries, and our allies and partners are also facing a communist China that is hell-bent—hell-bent—on dominating trade and repressing dissent. This is not a regional threat but a global one. China's comprehensive military modernization is stunning in its scope. The PRC is building weapons and capabilities to target U.S. forces at greater and greater range. We ignore this threat at our peril.

So there is never a good time for Congress to abdicate its role in guiding and overseeing national security policy, but the Biden administration's muddled mess of a foreign policy makes this an especially terrible time for the Senate Democratic majority to neglect these issues.

Chairman REED and Ranking Member INHOFE have given us an opportunity to fulfill the Senate's role in a serious, consequential way. Now the majority needs to let the Senate work. We need the kind of serious and rigorous floor process that the NDAA deserves.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in all of the time I have been in Washington, in both the House and the Senate, I have seen Republicans in control, in the majority, and I have seen Democrats in the majority. I have been on both sides of that, and I have seen Republican Presidents and Democrat Presidents. But one thing that doesn't change is that, when Democrats get power in Washington, they want to expand government, they want to grow government, they want to spend money.

If you just look throughout history, at least since the time I have been here, that is just a fact. We have already seen them this year—since the President came to power and the Democrats have had narrow majorities in the House and Senate, which they have interpreted somehow as being a mandate, but is a dead-even U.S. Senate—push through on a partisan basis a

\$1.9 trillion spending bill which expanded government. There is a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill that has passed the Senate in a bipartisan way, on which there was some agreement, and it is still awaiting action in the House of Representatives.

Already—already—in this new administration, that represents over \$3 trillion in spending, which is on infrastructure and some core hard infrastructure with respect to the bipartisan bill.

The other bill was of a lot of things that the Republicans felt weren't necessary, particularly after the five bills we passed last year in 2020 in response to the pandemic.

By the way, every one of those was on a bipartisan basis. So a lot of spending went on in responding to the pandemic—trillions and trillions of dollars.

The first thing that happened when the Democrats came to power was that they passed another \$2 trillion, and then an infrastructure bill. So we have already got over \$3 trillion spent at a time when we have \$30 trillion in debt—and growing by the day. Yet the Democrats' now proposal is to spend \$3.5 trillion. Some on their side want to spend up to \$6 trillion to grow and expand the government.

So I guess it doesn't come as any surprise that that is what Democrats do. When they gain power, when they get majorities, they want to grow; they want to expand government; they want to spend more money and raise taxes to do it. It is almost like kind of a rite of passage in that, if you are going to be a good Democrat, this is what you do.

As I said before, you know, after last year, in coming through the pandemic at a time when the country had to and both sides agreed to address the concerns and the needs that were out there—to keep people employed, to keep businesses operating and workers employed, to support our healthcare industry, to support our schools—there were enormous amounts of money that went into the economy last year.

You would think that when the Democrats took power this time that they might want to dial it back and just think about seeing how the economy reacts before going on a full-blown effort to grow and expand government once again, but what we saw right out of the gate, immediately—and, again, in a very partisan way—was a \$2 trillion spending bill.

I say that again because we all know that the amount of debt that we have today dwarfs, eclipses, anything—anything—in history even close to what we are talking about. Even if you go back to the thirties and the big expansion of government then—and, by the way, I think part of this is that President Biden was convinced that he could be the next FDR. And to do that, you have got to spend lots of money. And so trying to find stuff to spend it on has been a challenge. They have come up with a big list, and a list, again, that would be

financed with a lot of tax increases that, I think, would be incredibly harmful to the economy.

But what I want to talk about briefly this morning is just what has happened as a result of the spending that has already occurred and what, I think, is going to happen if the massive amount of spending they want to do from here forward actually happens.

Like I said, we will do everything we can to stop it. I think it is just an absolutely disastrous prescription for the economy right now and as to what people are already experiencing in their daily lives.

Last week, we learned that economic growth for the third quarter had fallen short of expectations, largely driven by a deceleration in consumer spending and supply problems of goods and labor.

Meanwhile, American families continue to deal with what is rapidly becoming a serious, long-term inflation problem that is attributable, in many respects—again, as I will get to later—to the amount of spending and the number of dollars that have been flooding the economy.

Last month, consumer prices rose at the fastest pace in 30 years. A recent estimate from the chief economist at Moody's Analytics suggested that an average household is having to spend an additional \$175 a month on basics, thanks to inflation—175 bucks a month.

That may not sound like much to a wealthy Democrat politician, but that is a lot of money for an ordinary American family. Having \$175 a month can be the difference between putting something away in savings and living paycheck to paycheck. It can be the difference between whether or not you can afford braces for your child or whether you have the money to replace a broken appliance or to make a needed car repair.

Our inflation problem has gotten to the point that it has overtaken wage growth. Inflation is growing faster than wages, which means that many American families have received a de facto pay cut. The growth in wages isn't keeping up with the increase in costs in their lives.

So how did we end up here?

As I said, a lot of the problem traces back to this past March, when the Democrats decided to pour a lot of unnecessary government money into the economy under the guise of COVID relief. By the time the President and the Democrats took office in January, Congress had passed no fewer than five bipartisan COVID relief bills—the most recent of them in December. The December COVID relief bill that we passed contained almost \$1 trillion in funding and met, essentially, all of the pressing COVID needs the country was facing.

But that didn't matter. That didn't matter to the Democrats. Now that they were in charge, they were eager to take advantage of the opportunity the